

Stewardship for Adults
Psalm 119: 137-144
Luke 19:1-10
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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Many of us were introduced to Zacchaeus by singing this song in church school:

Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
a wee little man was he.

Kids love this story because they can immediately identify with Zacchaeus. Like them, he had to stand on a chair or climb up a tree to see over the shoulders of taller people. Best of all, when Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus, innocent children vicariously sense Jesus looking straight at them.

Being adults expected to put away childish things, we don't necessarily identify with Zacchaeus being short, but we can find common ground in his stunted spiritual growth.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Tax collectors were the richest, but also the loneliest men in town. Working for the Romans came at a high price. When your neighbors found out, you were immediately branded a collaborator and cut off from the community.

So why did Zacchaeus want the job? It couldn't be just for the money.

Here's a plausible explanation. When Zacchaeus was growing up, was he bullied and mocked by the bigger kids in the neighborhood? If so, was his motivation to become a tax collector really a twisted desire for revenge? Being a Roman official, he could bully his childhood persecutors with impunity.

Of course, this is all speculation, but it's helpful speculation. Here's why. The gospel stories speak to you when you step into the plot and mingle with the players until the Holy Spirit kicks in and sparks your imagination. Suddenly these familiar stories are transformed into templates of our shared human experience.

That's when Zacchaeus's story becomes your story. Maybe you're not a crooked tax collector, but everyone else, you struggle with your own arrested spiritual development.

Intrigued by Zacchaeus's plight, you cautiously enter into his angst. You may fight it at first, but the longer you stick with him, the more you become aware of your shortcomings.

That's a good thing. Why? By sticking with Zacchaeus, you can finally see yourself stuck in a similar rut of your own making.

When he learned Jesus was coming to town, a power beyond him inspired Zacchaeus to be reckless. Risking his reputation as a Roman official, he made a spectacle of himself when he climbed up that sycamore tree. Having everything to lose and nothing to gain, he hoped by just seeing, and being seen, by Jesus something good would come from it.

As it happened, something good did come from it. Sizing up the situation, Jesus discerned Zacchaeus was the town outcast, especially after hearing the crowd's complaints when he said, "Zacchaeus, come down from there, I'm inviting myself to your house for lunch."

His neighbors were perplexed. "Why is Jesus going to his house? Zacchaeus is a thieving tax collector!"

But that's precisely why Jesus invited himself to lunch.

You know the rest of the story. Maybe for the first time in his life, Zacchaeus experienced unconditional acceptance. Most of us might have said, "Zacchaeus, I'll come to your house, but first you have to repent," but not Jesus. Zacchaeus was accepted and loved just the way he was.

Nothing is said about the intimate details about their lunch together because right then and there Zacchaeus openly confessed remorse over his crooked ways before making a startling announcement.

"Lord, half of what I own, I'm giving to the poor and the other half will be used to compensate everybody I cheated."

This is a classic conversion story. Zacchaeus was given a new heart and a right spirit. He didn't want to hate and be hated any more. He was tired of being isolated and resentful. He decided to quit the rat race and join the human race.

Notice Zacchaeus's transformation came with a costly promise. He was prepared to beggar himself. He promised Jesus he'd give away half his money to the poor and return the other half to the people he cheated.

Luke doesn't say anything about the neighbors' reaction to this promise, but we can speculate. Zacchaeus's conversion must've set off a chain reaction of goodwill spreading through the neighborhood. No longer being the poster boy for arrested development, Zacchaeus became "Exhibit A" to the transformative power of Christ bringing peace and reconciliation to the world through a repentant sinner.

Bringing peace and reconciliation to the world is what Christian discipleship is all about. That's also what Christian stewardship is all about.

Discipleship and stewardship are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. Faithful disciples recognize stewardship is an essential component of our faith and practice.

Being a disciple means denying yourself of anything compromising your relationship with God and your neighbor.

Being a steward means believing who you are and everything you own is on loan from God.

Our calling, as disciples and stewards is to offer up our time, talents and treasure to benefit Christ and his Kingdom.

After hearing Zacchaeus's promise to make restitution for his sins, Jesus declared, "Today's salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the son of man has come to seek out and to save the lost."
(Luke 19:9-10)

By saying, "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus was making a promise too. Zacchaeus was delivered from the power of death and sin so he could be involved in Christ's redeeming work in the here and now to prepare for the future coming of God's Kingdom to earth.

That's what salvation is all about. Through Christ's passion and resurrection, we are saved from the power of sin and death to give our lives in the preparation of the future coming of God's kingdom.

"Prepare the way of the Lord. That's your purpose in life. That's why you were born, to prepare the way.

Please pray about this before you recommit yourself to be faithful stewards of the giving of yourself or as St Paul put it, to, "offer yourself up as a living sacrifice, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:2)

Let us pray.

Lord, bless us with the grace to break free from our arrested spiritual development so we can grow in Christ and be like Christ by the way we live and give, generously and sacrificially to work of your Kingdom. Amen.